

Jesus is a *brother* to His own, not in a philosophical or metaphorical sense, or simply in terms of His love and affection for them. He and the Father's children are brethren in the fullest sense, as sharing the same human origin and nature. In the incarnation, the divine Logos united Himself to the human race by sharing in the same human stock; Jesus was every bit a son of Adam, just as all men are. This is not to say that He was marred by sin and alienated from His Father, but His blamelessness resulted from His conscious and complete contradiction of His Adamic humanness, not His exemption from it.

*Jesus opposed and condemned the fallen human nature and condition from **within** it, not from outside of it as a different kind of human being. As observed by the church father Gregory Nazianzus, "the unassumed is the unhealed."*

In order to consummately heal the being He created in His own image and likeness, God needed to become one with him. So "the Word became flesh"; Jesus was born a genuine son of Adam, but unto the goal of becoming a *new* Adam – the "Last Adam."

- He put to death Adam's fallen race in Himself, climaxing with His crucifixion, in order to be raised from the dead as a new kind of man – man as God intended him to be; man as celebrated in Psalm 8.
- But Jesus wasn't raised simply as a new human individual, but a new *Adam*: He came out of the grave as the "**first fruits from the dead**"; His triumph in death and resurrection was the triumph of mankind. Jesus is the fountainhead of a new human race (1 Corinthians 15:20-23, 42-49) that shares His life and nature, and so shares the same Father and is related to Him as true brothers and sisters.

This new human family of regal image-sons was the reason for the incarnation and atonement, which bore its "first fruit" in Jesus' resurrection and enthronement at the Father's right hand (cf. Genesis 1:26-31; Psalm 8; Jeremiah 33:19-22; Romans 8:16-18; 1 Corinthians 6:1-3; 2 Timothy 2:8-14; Revelation 5:1-10, 21:1-22:6). Having thus accomplished His mission on behalf of mankind, Jesus is not in any way ashamed or reluctant to call His Father's other image-children His brethren (vv. 10-11).

- d. Again, this brotherhood isn't theoretical, philosophical or metaphorical, but *ontological*. That is, the Son and His brethren equally share in "*flesh and blood*" (v. 14a). The point is not that Jesus had a physical body like other people, but that He was a fully human being. The wider context indicates that this was the writer's meaning, but it's absolutely clear from what follows. To fulfill His vocation, Jesus "had to be made like His brethren in all things." This was because His vocation involved *representation* and *substitution*. Jesus entered into the human calamity in order to resolve it in Himself, and so enable mankind to fulfill its created design. And at the heart of this calamity was the matter of lordship and dominion: Man was created to be God's image-son – His vice regent embodying His life, exercising His mind and will, and administering His loving and wise rule over His works. Man was created to embody God's lordship, but he'd tragically found himself reflecting a different lord and administering his lordship.

That lord had promised freedom to the image-children, but they'd only exchanged one master for another. Liberation from the divine mind and will hadn't brought human autonomy, but only subjection to a different, contrary mind and will. And because of what man is in his essential being, this liberation was deliverance from life into *death*: Man is the image and likeness of God, animated by His life and made authentic by His mind; when the divine-human intimacy is forfeited, man ceases to be man – he dies to himself and becomes a living lie. Death has consumed him, though his heart continues to beat (cf. Genesis 2:16-17, 5:1-5). In this condition, the mind that informs and governs man is estranged from the divine mind, but this vacuum is filled by the mind of another – the great contrary mind. The promise of self-actualization rendered the human image-son the enslaved son of the anti-human adversary, namely the satanic power.

The great evidence of Satan's absolute sway isn't immorality, injustice, violence, wickedness, foolishness, or any other unfortunate or evil characteristic of human beings and human culture. All such aspects of human existence only point to the singular proof of the power and reign of the "god of this age." It is the universality of *death* that proves the devil's universal dominion. Again, the scriptural concept of death is first a spiritual and ontological one, rather than a physical one. Mortality is a consequence of death, not the substance of it; the death of the human *body* follows from the death of the human *being*.

This perspective is critical to understanding the relationship between sin and death, and how it is that the devil possessed the power of death (v. 14b).

- Just as death pertains, in the first instance, to the human *being*, so it is with sin. Whereas people naturally think of "sin" in terms of particular thoughts, words and deeds, such phenomena are only symptoms of it. Sin is deviation ("missing the mark") at the point of the very essence of one's humanness. And because humanness is defined by perfect intimacy with God ("I in you and you in me"), sin exists whenever this intimacy is compromised. This is the sense in which "the wages of sin is death," and it's the reason that death is the *inherent* consequence of sin, and not a punishment that God imposes
- The scripture indicates that this deviation was, in the first instance, the fruit of satanic deception aimed at inducing doubt and suspicion toward God (Genesis 3:1-5). The deceiver sought to disrupt, and ultimately fracture, the intimacy between the Creator-Father and His image-children, and he succeeded in his endeavor (Genesis 3:6-13). Thus Satan is the author of death (Genesis 3:16-24), and he has wielded it as the great and compelling power of his dominion ever since. This is what the writer meant by saying that the devil "has the power of death"; it isn't that death is ultimately under his control, but death – as the fundamental and universal principle of human existence – characterizes the realm of satanic rule, and it is the chain that keeps human beings under his dominion.

The Hebrews writer recognized that death is the most profound form of slavery, for it is something that people have no power over, and so cannot liberate themselves from. Once alienated from God and severed from His life, human beings have no recourse of remedy. Even if men could discover a “fountain of youth” that granted them immortality, it would not deliver them from death. It would only sustain them in that state, perpetuating forever their pseudo-human existence as the most tragic and unimaginable curse. In reality, though, such a situation could never exist, for man is both flesh and spirit; it is impossible that his outward condition should be unaffected by his inward deviation.

Death is the ultimate enslavement (and so the great instrument of satanic power), and this bondage expresses itself in various ways. Undoubtedly, the most profound of those is *fear*. Here, the writer seemed to connect fear with physical death (v. 15), and it’s certainly true that many people are tormented and even enslaved by their fear of dying. But there is a greater, more fundamental fear that grips every human being, and this was the writer’s ultimate concern. *This fear is the deep-seated, ever-present uneasiness and apprehension that are inherent to human existence in alienation from God* (Genesis 3:6-10).

- The destruction of divine-human intimacy resulted in God becoming a fearful unknown to His image-children. Unable to know Him *in truth*, as He actually is, they are left to either fashion Him in their own image, or avoid Him altogether. Either way, people are plagued by fear – the nagging, often unconscious fear of God as *the other*. Even those who deny God’s existence are acknowledging Him as *other*.
- This fear of the unknown “other” defines people’s inherent relationship with God, *but also with other human beings*. To the extent that people don’t detect a semblance of themselves in others, they instinctively view them with uneasiness and reserve, if not suspicion or even fear. All of these responses, conscious or otherwise, reflect the reality of human *death* – the state of separation/alienation (“me and not me”) that defines natural human existence. So it was that fearful hiding and finger-pointing were death’s “first fruit,” and it quickly ripened into lethal antipathy.

The Hebrews writer understood the meaning and power of death, and had more than physical mortality in mind when He spoke of Jesus delivering God’s image-children from death and the one who wields its power. Jesus *did* overcome mortality (evident in His own resurrection), but as a consequence of His victory over death in its *entirety* (John 11:25-26; Romans 8:1-11). And by conquering death, Jesus also stripped Satan of the power that he possessed because of death – the power that works through fear (1 John 4:16-18). But as death is a conquered foe that isn’t yet destroyed (1 Corinthians 15), so it is with the devil; Jesus triumphed over him and continues to plunder his house, yet he’s still at work in the world as he awaits the day of his destruction (cf. 1 Peter 5:8 with Matthew 12:22-29; John 12:23-33; Romans 16:17-20; James 4:7; Revelation 2:10, 12:1ff).